

Jesus: The Greatest Giver
Be an Encourager, Part Three
2 Corinthians 8: 1 – 9
June 27, 2010

An offering for the destitute Christians in Jerusalem was being received by the Gentile Christians. Paul had organized the offering, and his visit to Corinth was drawing near to receive their offering. Word had come to Paul that the Corinthian believers were not as enthusiastic about receiving the offering as in the beginning.

How would Paul motivate these saints in Corinth to continue their weekly collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem? Well, he uses a novel approach; he first points to the striking effort by the believers in Macedonia, who had given more than might be reasonably expected. This seems an unlikely example on the surface. Corinth, in Greece, was a cosmopolitan, commerce-driven city of sophistication and culture; Macedonia, in northern Greece, was a poverty-ridden backwater, whose main claim to fame was that Alexander the Great had come from there – and that had been many centuries before. The church was a tiny speck in the pagan culture. So, what characterized their giving?

The Church at Macedonia gave:

1. Sacrificially (2 Cor. 8: 2 – 3). Even though they were experiencing poverty, they gave beyond their ability. Paul may have been surprised at their level of giving.

2. Joyfully (v. 2). Even in poverty they discovered the joy in giving.

3. Voluntarily (v. 3). They gave from a willing heart, not because they were shamed into giving or had been coerced into giving under duress.

4. Persistently (v. 4). They would not take “NO” for an answer, or fall back on a plea of poverty. They were determined to give, and no one was going to talk them out of participating!

5. Of themselves (v. 5). They gave of themselves first to the Lord. The implication is striking; when people have the priorities of life straight – my relationship with God first, my family second, and everything else following – then, one’s stewardship of his life is in clear focus.

This is the example Paul sets before the believers at Corinth. They ought to go and do likewise. But Paul obviously knows the saints at Corinth, because he goes on to give further encouragement. He shares with them that Jesus is the greatest giver ever known. His example is the highest example Paul could possibly use to motivate them to give. Notice what Paul; shares about Jesus as the greatest giver ever known:

Jesus is the greatest giver because:

1. He possessed unlimited wealth (2 Cor. 8: 9a).

A. The term “rich” leads us to think of material worth. After all, that is how we calculate wealth. As it has been correctly said, that is how we keep score in this world!

1. When I was in the Navy, one of my shipmates said his father was considered a millionaire, because his dad’s salary as president of a company was over \$49,000 per year. That was the calculation 40 years ago. I was in awe; I had never known anyone who was rich!

B. Of course, we understand right away that Paul wasn’t talking about a financial statement of Jesus’ net worth. His wealth was not measured in dollars, or how much property He owns.

1. From eternity Jesus was true God and possessed the fullness of Godhood. He was God Almighty, through Whom the universe was made, and Who upholds all things by His power. He existed from eternity as the second person of the Trinity.

C. We often read of the rich and famous, and it is difficult to imagine what it would be like to possess that kind of wealth. But the wealthy in the world pale in comparison to Jesus. His riches are beyond our comprehension! That wealth has been His from all eternity, and there was not a moment when He was not rich as God is rich.

2. He experienced unparalleled poverty (v. 9b).

A. Think on this: Jesus gave it all away! When He became a man, He laid aside all His Godly glory.

1. He was not born in a palace or even a hospital. His crib was a manger (a feeding trough), and his first clothes were swaddling clothes. His parents were so poor, when it came time to present a sacrifice required by law for the firstborn son, they could afford only two young pigeons.

B. He lived a life of poverty and never owned property; in fact, Jesus depended upon family and friends for food and shelter.

C. He died on a criminal’s cross in order to save us. Philippians 2: 5 – 8 shares that Jesus laid aside His glory and subjected Himself to radical poverty. By the standards of His day He was very poor.

3. Through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection we have salvation and eternal life (v. 9c)

A. It is the grace of God that turns selfish people into joyful givers. Paul shares that Jesus takes away our selfishness and makes us generous and joyful givers.

1. The world would have us believe that giving less, and keeping more for ourselves, will make us happier and more fulfilled.

2. God’s purpose in sending Jesus is to save us and to create joyful, loving and generous givers. If this is true, the more generous we are, the happier and more fulfilled we will be, because when we give we are the most like God.

B. This verse does not mean that if we give to God we will get rich. The Macedonian Christians we model givers, but they lived in poverty.

1. They had learned that you cannot out give God. Rather, giving should be proof of God's love in our life.

C. Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth to give a generous offering because he believed they really wanted to do it.

1. The response to the sacrifice of Jesus is generosity in their gifts. He does not compel them to give, but suggests they give in response to Jesus' gift to them.

It comes down to this concerning the motive for giving: because God has shown great grace in giving His Son for our sins, we should respond with generosity. The good news is that God gives us grace to be willing to give. It is always an act of grace when someone gives generously. It simply is not in our nature to do something so selfless. His grace should help us realize the opportunity to give is a privilege not a burden!

Because God the Son has given so much, the least we can do is give cheerfully and freely. This is Christian giving that pleases the Father! The grace of God turns our selfishness into joyful giving.

Let's pray!